

## Review

Tor A. Åfarli: *The Syntax of Norwegian Passive Constructions*.  
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### 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION: THE READERSHIP

As Åfarli himself says in his introduction “this is primarily a book about the syntax of Norwegian passive constructions and more directly about the passive phenomenon in general” (ix). The book is written against the background of generative syntax, specifically the *Government and Binding* framework and is said to be a substantive revision of a PhD dissertation. At times, though, the book retains a PhD flavour and I feel that this explains a number of its drawbacks. It is possible that some of the comments made below are simply related to the fact that quite some time has elapsed between the writing of the PhD, the revisions, and the publication of this book.

Åfarli's book offers an interesting description and analysis of the Norwegian passive, but I feel that the book is not sharply focused with respect to readership. There are various kinds of readers who might potentially take an interest in it, and I mention only three: (i) the specialized generative syntactician who is also at home in the syntax of Scandinavian (or Germanic) languages and who wants all the technical details of the analysis; (ii) the generative syntactician who is aware of the recent theoretical developments but whose work does not include the Scandinavian languages; (iii) the reader interested in Scandinavian syntax but who might not necessarily be aware of all the recent developments in the theory used. Each type of reader would read this book with specific expectations, and would probably find something worth pursuing; I suspect, however, that none of them would be completely satisfied. I underline that this conclusion is not necessarily negative: the book will probably not satisfy all the expectations of every single reader completely, but a broad readership will be relatively satisfied. I also feel that each reader will be intrigued by some or other aspect of Åfarli's work and will want to pursue some of the theoretical and empirical issues.

### 2. GENERAL THESIS OF THE BOOK

Åfarli's book starts from a brief discussion of two analyses of the passive construction, the orthodox GB analysis and a revised analysis due to Jaeggli (1986), Baker (1988), Roberts (1987), and Baker, Johnson & Roberts (1989). The standard analysis is summarized as follows:

A passive participle is formed from an active verb, triggering Case absorption, and by Burzio's Generalization, *subsequent* dethematization of the subject position. ... As a result of Case absorption, the postverbal NP must move to the subject position to get Case from the tense (or agreement) feature (Åfarli: 1992:22–3, italics LH)

Given the drawbacks of the standard analysis (cf. 23 ff.), the “new” analysis develops the basic idea that the passive morphology is in fact assigned a thematic role, it is an argument of the verb. Specifically, the passive morphology is assigned the external theta role, thus rendering the canonical subject position theta-free and a possible landing site for NP movement. In the “new” analysis, the dethematization of the subject position is taken to be the crucial property of passives.

Åfarli’s book applies the new analysis to the various aspects of the passive construction in Norwegian; he develops some of the details of such an analysis, occasionally contrasting Norwegian with English.

### 3. THE NORWEGIAN DATA

First of all, I was surprised that the book does not contain even the briefest introduction to the general syntactic properties of Norwegian. For instance, the V2 properties are not addressed at all, and the exemplifications might lead the reader to assume that the syntax of Norwegian is like that of English. Obviously, the author might argue that the V2 properties of the language are irrelevant to the issues concerned. This point is not uncontroversial, though, and I return to it briefly in section 6.

The reader looking for descriptive information on the syntax of Norwegian may be surprised by the relatively little attention paid to the *-s* passive in Norwegian, illustrated in (1) (his 34):

- (1) Katta ses av oss.  
       cat the see-s by us.  
       ‘The cat is seen by us’.

Though Åfarli does discuss the construction, some of the major theoretical problems it raises are not addressed. I return to this point below.

I was particularly frustrated by the following paragraph (p. 13):

Note finally that Norwegian shows a passive construction, called the double passive or the complex passive, that consists of an *s*-passive verb immediately followed by a passive participle, or of a passive participle immediately followed by another passive participle. I have not included an analysis of these constructions in the present work. See Engh (1984) for a description of Norwegian complex passives, and Hellan (1984) or Taraldsen (1984) for proposals of analyses.

It would have been nice to have had at least some examples illustrating the pattern, especially since the references are not obviously accessible to non-specialists: Engh (1984) and Hellan (1984) are published in the *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax*, to which not necessarily every reader will have access, and Taraldsen’s (1984) paper was published in a festschrift whose circulation may also be relatively limited. Of course, a paragraph such as the one cited finds its place in a PhD dissertation, but I would have preferred this section to have been revised, deleted, or relegated to a footnote. The reader of this book is left wondering whether Åfarli’s own analysis of passive carries over to the complex passives. He can only speculate, for instance, whether complex passives may also be found with intransitive verbs, whether either verb of the complex passive may be a pseudo-passive, and so on.

#### 4. THE NEW ANALYSIS

##### 4.1. *The Position of PASS: Evidence from Pseudo-passives*

Adopting the new analysis, Åfarli proposes that the passive morpheme or PASS absorbs the external theta role of the verb. The first part of his discussion focuses on the syntactic position and on the nature of PASS and raises many interesting questions.

Åfarli points out that if it were true that it is the participial ending which realizes PASS and which absorbs the external theta role (and case in English), then one would be led to adopt the same analysis for perfective participles which visibly assign case and have an overt external theta role. He concludes that PASS cannot simply be equated with the participial morphology.

On the basis of the English pseudo-passive in which V and P reanalyse:

- (2) He was [[talked with] PASS] (his (7), p. 33)

Åfarli proposes that PASS is an abstract morpheme which occurs to the right of the reanalysed preposition *with* in (2). In this example, *with* case marks PASS. I return to this point presently. Suffice it to say for the time being that in English no part of the actual verbal morphology itself is identified with passive. Åfarli assumes that the same analysis holds for the periphrastic passive in Norwegian.

Let us briefly consider Åfarli's analysis of pseudo-passives. Consider (3) and (4):

- (3) a. \*Ollie was talked twice with.  
b. Ollie was talked with twice.
- (4) a. Ola vart snakka to gonger med.  
Ola was talked twice with.  
b. Ola vart snakka med to gonger.  
Ola was talked with twice.  
(Åfarli 1992:87)

According to Åfarli, PASS does not require abstract case in Norwegian, hence the Norwegian examples in (4) are grammatical even though *snakke* is an intransitive verb which fails to assign case. In English, on the other hand, PASS requires case. The intransitive verb *talk* cannot assign case; PASS has to be case-marked via the preposition *with*. This is only possible by reanalysis. V-P reanalysis is possible in (3b) and impossible in (3a) because of the intervening adverb *twice*. (5) corresponds to Åfarli's (27):

- (5) a. \*Ollie<sub>i</sub> was [<sub>v</sub> talked PASS] twice with t<sub>i</sub>  
b. Ollie<sub>i</sub> was [<sub>v</sub> talked with PASS] t<sub>i</sub> twice.

As pointed out by Vikner (1991:249) the mechanism for case assignment to PASS invoked for (5b), and also for (2) above, is rather unexpected: "A mechanism which allows (part of) a head (i.e. the passive morphology) to be assigned case from a head of its complement (i.e. the preposition) seems rather implausible" (Vikner 1991:249). It seems to me that Vikner's challenge is a reasonable one which Åfarli does not take into account in his discussion. Recall that (5b) is rather essential in Åfarli's discussion of the position of PASS.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.2. *The -s Passive*

With respect to the *-s* passive, Åfarli proposes that the *-s* morpheme itself realizes PASS. (6) shows his representation for the passive *slas* ('is beaten')

- (6)  $\begin{bmatrix} \text{v} & [\text{sla}] \\ \text{beat-} & \end{bmatrix} \quad \begin{bmatrix} \text{N} & \text{s} \\ & \text{s} \end{bmatrix}$

In (6) the passive morphology is overtly realized by *s*, which "is added to the far right of the verb in question, i.e. it follows the tense morpheme of the verb" (1992:14).

Following the recent interest in the role of functional projections and their relation to inflectional morphology (Pollock 1989, Belletti 1990), these data are of particular theoretical importance. It is slightly surprising how little this issue is discussed in Åfarli's book. Since Pollock's (1989) discussion of the relation between the inflectional morphology of V and V-movement, a paper included in Åfarli's bibliography, it has been assumed that functional heads correspond to inflectional morphology. Under such a view, the *-s* morphology could be taken to correspond to a functional head. Following Belletti's (1990) analysis, the fact that the passive morphology is outside the tense morphology might suggest that the projection headed by *-s* in Norwegian perhaps dominates TP, an interesting result which might be worth pursuing in detail, specifically so since Åfarli proposes that Norwegian lacks the AGR projection.

#### 4.3. *PartP, PASS and Agreement*

Returning to the periphrastic passive with auxiliary and participle, observe that proposals in which participial endings are equated with PASS now also come under review for theory internal reasons. Again following the proposals that inflectional morphology corresponds to functional heads, it has been proposed in the literature on Romance (Kayne 1989, Belletti 1990) that the participial ending heads a functional projection, PartP. Initially, Kayne (1989) and Belletti (1990) equated the participial ending with the functional projection for object agreement (AGRo) as accounting for the participial agreement in (7):

- (7) a. Jean a ouvert la porte.  
Jean has opened the door.  
b. Jean l'a ouverte.  
Jean it has opened.  
'Jean has opened it.'  
c. La porte est ouverte.  
the door is opened.  
'The door is open.'

The idea is that the movement of the object in (7b) and (7c) through the specifier of PartP triggers the specifier head agreement. Recently, it has been shown (Friedemann & Siloni 1993) that the projection headed by the AGR inflection for object agreement, AGRoP, must be kept separate from the projection associated with the participial inflection, PartP.

Given these proposals, the relation between thematic role, passive morpheme, and the participial morphology, as postulated for instance by Roberts (1987) in the new analysis (Åfarli 1992:33 ff.), should be carefully re-examined. It would

be very interesting to confront the so-called “new analysis” of the passive with these proposals concerning the role of the functional heads in the syntax.

Another interesting extension of the discussion would be a comparison between the Norwegian data of participle agreement (pp. 11 ff., pp. 91 ff.) and their Romance counterparts. For instance, the data in (8) and (9) (Åfarli's (38) and (39) on pp. 91–92) find a parallel in French as shown in (10) and (11):

- (8) a. Ein mann (m,sg) vart skoten (m,sg).  
‘A man was shot.’
- (8) b. Eit dyr (n,sg) vart skote (n,sg).  
‘An animal was shot.’
- (8) c. Mange menn (m,pl) vart skotne (m,pl).  
‘Many men were shot.’
- (8) d. Mange dyr (n,pl) vart skotne (n,pl).  
‘Many animals were shot.’
  
- (9) a. Det vart skote/\*skoten ein mann.  
‘There was a man shot.’
- (9) b. Det vart skote eit dyr.  
‘There was an animal shot.’
- (9) c. Det vart skote/\*skotne mange menn.  
‘There were many men shot.’
- (9) d. Det vart skote/\*skotne mange dyr.  
‘There were many animals shot.’
  
- (10) a. Un animal a été tué.  
an animal has been killed
- (10) b. Trois animaux ont été tué\*(s).  
three animals have been killed\*(sg)/(pl)
  
- (11) a. Il a été tué un animal.  
there has been killed an animal  
‘There has an animal been killed.’
- (11) b. Il a été tué (\*s) trois animaux.  
there has been killed three animals  
‘There have three animals been killed.’

The comparative angle might offer illuminating elements to the description of Norwegian. Moreover, a comparison with Romance is all the more relevant given Åfarli's assumption that Norwegian lacks verbal AGR, contrary to French, in which verbal AGR is strong. The comparison might lead to interesting insights about the status of AGR in a clause.

## 5. PASS AS N°

### 5.1. NP and DP

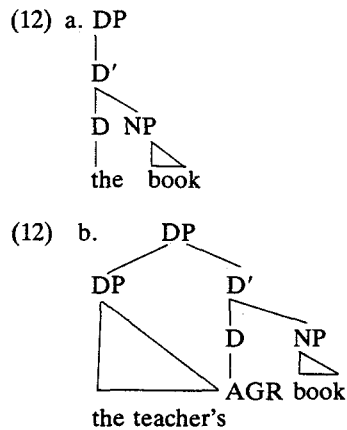
Concerning the feature composition of the abstract PASS, Åfarli proposes that:

PASS [is] a designated 0-level bound morpheme counterpart to phrase level pronouns. It may be said to be an N° pronoun which is semantically unspecified apart from the specification of its pronominal features. (30)

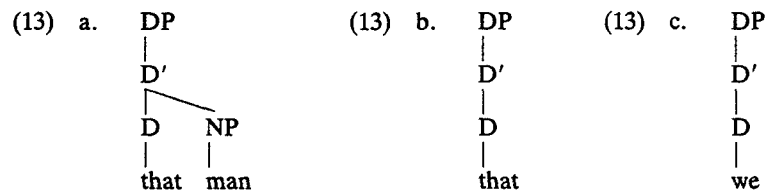
As he points out (fn1, p. 50):

This is consistent with Baker's (1988) remark that passive morphemes in Chamorro, as arguments 'generally have the meaning of a kind of semi-definite pronoun, rather similar to someone or something in English'. It is also consistent with Roberts' (1987) construal of the passive morpheme as a clitic pronoun.

It would be interesting to try to embed his analysis in the recent analyses of NPs, pronouns and clitics. Abney (1987) was one of the first to elaborate the symmetry between NPs and clausal projections. He proposes that in the same way that the clause is a VP dominated by the appropriate functional projections (cf. Pollock 1989), the category which is standardly referred to as NP should be seen as a projection of N dominated by a functional projection. The following are some of the structures he proposes:



In (12a) D is realized as the determiner *the*, D selects an NP complement, here the bare N *book*. In (12b) D dominates the abstract nominal AGR which assigns genitive to *the teacher*, in [Spec,DP]. Certain realizations of D, the articles *the* and *a*, require the presence of an NP complement. Other instances of D do not require a complement. The demonstrative *that* takes an NP complement in (13a) does not in (13b). Following Postal's account for pronouns (1969), pronouns are reinterpreted as Ds without complements, as in (13c).



Adopting Åfarli's position as a starting-point, it would seem *a priori* attractive to identify PASS with D° or with a functional head such as Num/Pers (cf. among others, Ritter 1991, Rouveret 1991), etc. The underspecification for

semantic features could then follow from the impoverished nature of the relevant functional head.

### 5.2. *So-called Pronouns and Principle B*

The binding properties of the PASS head could possibly be related to its feature composition so that Åfarli no longer has to appeal to the assumption that 'morphological objects are opaque to binding' (Åfarli 1992:31).

Consider, for instance, that, though loosely referred to as pronouns, the French clitic *en*, the Italian clitic *ne*, and the West Flemish clitic *der* are all subject to principle C, both when interpreted as a PP and in the partitive reading.

- (14) a. Pierre pense que Marie en est amoureuse.
- (14) b. Peiero pensa che Maria ne è innamorata.
- (14) c. Pierre peinst da Marie der verliefd ip is'.  
'Pierre thinks that Marie is in love with him.'

In (14) the clitics, French *en*, Italian *ne*, West Flemish *der*, can be construed as a PP 'of him', but they cannot be coreferential with the subject of the matrix clause. Coreference is possible with the pronouns *le*, *lo*, and *em*:

- (15) a. Pierre pense que Marie le connaît.
- (15) b. Peiero pensa che Maria lo conosce.
- (15) c. Pierre peinst da Marie em kent.  
Pierre thinks that Marie him knows

(cf. Belletti 1993, Haegeman 1993, Lamiroy 1991, 1992 and Ruwet 1990):

Similarly in (16), where the clitic has a partitive reading. In (16a) the clitic *ne* cannot refer to *Gianni e Mario*, in (16b) coreference with the pronoun *loro* is possible. (17) illustrates West Flemish.

- (16) a. [Gianni e Mario]<sub>i</sub> mi hanno chiesto di ricevne almeno [uno e<sub>i</sub>/i] prima delle undici. (Cresti 1993:8)  
Gianni and Mario me have asked to receive *ne* at least one before eleven.  
'Gianni and Mario have asked me to receive at least one of them before eleven.'
- (16) b. [Gianni e Mario]<sub>i</sub> mi hanno chiesto di ricevere almeno uno di loro<sub>i/j</sub> prima delle undici. (Cresti 1993:8)  
Gianni and Mario me have asked to receive at least one of them before eleven.  
'Gianni and Mario have asked me to receive at least one of them before eleven'.
- (17) a. [Valère en Marie]<sub>i</sub> willen dan-k der<sub>i</sub> ten minstens ienen van zien  
Valère and Marie want that I there at least one of see  
'Valère and Marie want me to see at least one of them.'
- (17) b. Valère en Marie willen dan-k ten minstens ienen van under zien  
Valère and Marie want that I at least one of them see  
(cf. Belletti 1993 for Romance, Haegeman 1993 for West Flemish).



The same principle C effect is observed with West Flemish *ze*, the third-person clitic for feminine and for plural (cf. Haegeman 1993).

- (18) a. da Marie<sub>i</sub> peinst da Jan eur<sub>i/j</sub>/ze<sub>i/j</sub> gezein eet  
that Marie thinks that Jan her seen has  
'that Marie thinks that Jan has seen her'
- (18) b. da Marie<sub>i</sub> eur broere peinst da Jan eur<sub>i/j</sub>/ze<sub>i/j</sub> gezien eet  
that Marie her brother thinks that Jan her seen has  
'that Marie's brother thinks that Jan has seen her.'

The data above show that what one might loosely label pronominal elements, i.e. constituents which encode *phi* features, are not necessarily subject to principle B. Belletti (1993) proposes that the categorial status of the clitics *ne* and *en* is responsible for their binding properties. Haegeman (1993) proposes that the feature content of *ze* and *er* determines their properties. It would be tempting to try to explain the binding properties of PASS either in terms of its feature content or in terms of its categorial status.

## 6. EXPLETIVE CONSTRUCTIONS AND PASSIVES

In Norwegian, passive constructions are compatible with post-verbal object NPs:

- (19) a. Det vart slatt ein hund  
it became hit a dog

The same construction is found, for instance in Dutch, though not in English:

- (19) b. Er is een hond overreden  
there was a dog run over
- (19) c. \*There was run over a dog

Åfarli proposes that the passive participle in (19a) (and presumably also in (19b)) case marks the postverbal object NP. The PASS morpheme is visible by a form of incorporation, thus freeing the accusative case for the object NP. In examples of passive sentences where the object NP has moved to the canonical subject position, Åfarli proposes that the chain of the moved NP will have two cases, the accusative assigned by passive V and the nominative assigned by I.

- (19) d. Ein hund vart slatt  
a dog was hit

Åfarli explicitly admits case conflict and rejects Burzio's generalization (cf. pp. 68–69). He extends the analysis to ergative constructions such as (20). In (20a) the NP *ein ulf* is assigned accusative, in (20b) the A-chain created by NP movement of *ein ulf* is assigned both accusative (by *kjem*) and nominative (by INFL).<sup>2</sup>

- (20) a. Det kjem ein ulf.  
it comes a wolf
- (20) b. Ein ulf kjem.  
a wolf comes



The question arises how to distinguish English, in which impersonal passives with an expletive subject are ungrammatical, from Norwegian, in which they are grammatical. Åfarli proposes that the contrast between English and Norwegian follows from a case parameter: in English, he argues, PASS must be case marked, in Norwegian PASS does not need case. This means that the verb will assign its structural accusative to the PASS morpheme in English, hence it cannot case mark a postverbal object NP.

The case parameter is also used to explain the contrast in (21).

- (21) a. Det vart sunge.  
there was sung  
(21) b. \*There was sung.

Åfarli says:

Given that intransitive verbs do not assign postverbal abstract Case, the English passives formed from intransitive verbs in [21b] are ungrammatical since PASS does not receive Case and thus violates the Case Filter. On the other hand, the corresponding Norwegian clauses in [21a] are grammatical since PASS does not require abstract Case in Norwegian and the failure of PASS to receive Case does not constitute a case Filter violation in that language (1992:85).

Lappin & Shlonsky (1993) point out some empirical problems for the view that intransitive verbs in English fail to assign abstract case. I reproduce one of these problems here, after Rappaport (1989). Intransitive verbs in English assign structural case in examples like (22):

- (22) a. He laughed himself sick  
(22) b. He ran his heels flat

The subjects of the resultative predicates in (22a) and (22b) are assigned accusative case. Clearly the case is structural and assigned by the (intransitive?) V. If *laugh* can case-mark *himself* in (22a) then it is not obvious why the impersonal passive in (22c) is excluded as a case theory violation:

- (22) c. It was laughed all night/there was laughed all night.

Concerning impersonal passives, Åfarli also discusses the following pair:

- (23) a. There was a man shot  
(23) b. \*Det vart ein mann skoten

In (23a) the object of the passive verb has moved leftward, leading to grammaticality in English but to ungrammaticality in Norwegian. Åfarli proposes that the contrast follows from the different case assigning properties of the passive auxiliary.

With respect to the expletive construction, though, I fear that Åfarli focuses too narrowly on the specificity of the passive and ergative constructions in Norwegian. The expletive construction raises important questions which go beyond the material discussed in the book under review. Vikner (1991) offers a systematic survey of the expletive construction in a range of Germanic languages and the position of the object/subject in this construction. He analyses German,

Icelandic, Danish, English, and French, and assumes that Dutch and Frisian behave like German with regard to the relevant properties, that Yiddish is like Icelandic, and that Faroese, Norwegian and Swedish behave like Danish, and that the Romance languages are like French. On the basis of a detailed description of the expletive construction in relation to (i) ergative verbs, (ii) active transitive verbs, (iii) passive transitive verbs, (iv) active intransitive verbs, and (v) passive intransitives, Vikner establishes a correlation between the distribution of NP arguments in the expletive construction with (i) Verb Second and (ii) V<sup>o</sup> to I<sup>o</sup> movement.

## CONCLUSION

This book is in general well written and every kind of readership should find some area worth pursuing, but will also be disappointed, I fear, in their expectations. Personally, I regret that Áfarli has failed to integrate the promising account of passivization represented by the so-called “new analysis of passive” in the recent developments in the theory concerning the role and nature of functional heads. In so doing, he could have elaborated a discussion which would have been less language-specific and more far-reaching, and perhaps paradoxically I think that he could have done more justice to the specific properties of Norwegian and especially to the -s passive.

## NOTES

1 Vikner himself offers some data from pseudo-passives in Danish which are problematic for Áfarli's approach. I refer the reader to Vikner's own work. For an alternative discussion of the position of PASS, see also Lappin & Shlonsky (1993).

2 Specialists in Scandinavian syntax will perhaps be surprised that Áfarli does not consider Vikner's (1991) analysis, which is diametrically opposed to his own and where case conflict is used to rule out certain ungrammatical examples. Probably this omission is simply due to the fact that both authors were writing about the same time. Observe that the postverbal object in (19a) and in (20a) must be indefinite. Belletti (1988) interprets this in terms of partitive case assignment. Áfarli (71–2) rejects Belletti's analysis. In order to deal with the definiteness effect in (19a) and (20a) Áfarli invokes a semantic explanation (pp. 69–73).

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